

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
BETTER JOBS AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 14 MARCH, 2017 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK
PART 1

PRESENT:

Councillors Sutherland, M. (Vice-Chairman - in the Chair)

Cartwright, Mrs. S.M.	Johnson, T.B.
Cooper, Miss J.	Molineux, G.N.
Freeman, Miss M.A.	Peake, Mrs. C.L.
Grice, Mrs. D.	Pearson, A. (substituting for Mrs.
Hoare, M.W.A. (substituting for G.	C.E. Martin)
Burnett)	Snape, P.A.

Also in attendance as an observer:

Councillor G. Alcott (Economic Development and Planning Portfolio Leader)

(In the absence of the Chairman, Councillor Mrs. C.E. Martin, the Vice-Chairman, Councillor M. Sutherland took the Chair).

23. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted for Councillors Mrs. C.E. Martin (Chairman), G. Burnett and Mrs. D.M. Todd (Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader).

Notification had been received that Councillor A. Pearson would be in attendance as substitute for Councillor Mrs. C.E. Martin and Councillor M. Hoare would be in attendance as substitute for Councillor G. Burnett.

24. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations

No declarations of interests or party whip declarations were received.

25. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December, 2016 were approved as a correct record.

26. Update on Local Bus Services and The Buses Bill

John Morgan, Planning Officer, explained that bus services had been slowly declining over recent years. In September 2015 Officers attended a meeting with Arriva and Staffordshire County Council where it was explained that Arriva were planning to undertake a revamp of the network and new services were to be provided in Wimblebury and the Bevan Lee Estate. However, the additional patronage did not materialise and due to budget cuts and the decline in passengers and revenue this revamp did not live up to expectations. The Committee noted that the decline of bus services was a national problem not just a local issue.

He advised Members that Arriva had been invited to the meeting to provide an update on the network performance and Staffordshire County Council had been asked to attend to provide an update on the Buses Bill.

The Chairman then welcomed Jeff Tucker (Staffordshire County Council) and Richard Emery and David Brent (Arriva Midlands) to the meeting.

Richard Emery advised the Committee that Arriva Midlands had 19 Depots prior to September 2106, with depots in both Cannock and Stafford. 175 staff were employed at the Cannock depot with 50 buses operating from there. 48 staff were employed at the Stafford depot with 16 buses operating from there.

During a 3 year period (between 2012 to 2015) there had been a reduction of £1.7m in local funding, a reduction of £1.2m in tender revenue and a reduction of £500,000 in the concessionary travel scheme. The Stafford and Cannock depots had a 25% decline in revenue during this 3 year period and in 2015 both depots made a loss. It was essential that Arriva made a profit and therefore in September 2016 a tough decision had to be made in order to reduce the revenue reduction. It was decided to close the Stafford depot and staff and services were transferred to other depots and some services were withdrawn. The restructure of the Cannock and Stafford depots led to the removal of 12 buses which were operating loss making routes.

He explained that the aim of the network review was to simplify the network, remove loss making routes and to make better use of resources. Following the review punctuality increased by 7%, complaints reduced by 43%, customer satisfaction rose by 6% in Cannock and there was an increase of 17% in passengers by mile. Arriva had a more sustainable base following the review. In order to build on this sustainable base Arriva would be concentrating on core services, introducing promotions and looking at fares in order to increase the number of passengers.

Members were then offered the opportunity to ask questions. A Member asked whether there were any plans to introduce a bus service from Cannock to Stoke hospital. Richard Emery advised that there was no intention of introducing a direct service from Cannock to Stoke. However, passengers could get to Stoke by going from Cannock to Stafford and then onto Stoke. The Stoke service was provided by another bus operator.

Jeff Tucker commented that the main bus operators did not see journeys to

hospitals as a market they could cater for and the Council was trying to encourage voluntary car schemes to assist in these journeys. He added that 85% of Staffordshire's bus services were provided commercially with the County Council supporting 15%. The Council was not in a position to put funding in and had prioritised on the necessary services. Alternative funding to maintain services was available in the form of s106 contributions from developers. The County Council would continue to work with bus operators but there were tight financial constraints.

A Member asked whether the County Council had any plans to cut services or funding to the bus companies. Jeff Tucker advised that any cuts would be a decision for Members and any future changes to services would go out to consultation. The budget for Cannock Chase District was the same as this year for next year so services would be maintained next year. He did not know what the budget would be for 2018/19 and asked Members to note that although the County Council supported bus services it was not a statutory function.

The Chairman commented that when changes were made to routes there should be better communication of these changes. David Brent from Arriva explained that when changes took place in September 2016 road shows had been held in Cannock and Stafford town centres. In addition the timetable changes were listed on Arriva's website and notices were placed at relevant bus stops.

John Morgan commented that Arriva used to supply timetables which were placed in the Council's reception areas. However, these were not supplied on a regular basis. Richard Emery advised that timetables could be provided if requested.

The Chairman understood that Arriva had to operate as a commercial business but considered that the public got annoyed that bus services were being cut and this did not reflect well on the brand. The representatives from Arriva and the County Council agreed that they would work together to improve this view.

Another Member reiterated the concern over the difficulties residents had with travelling to hospitals. He considered that if it was necessary to use another bus operator to make the journey to Stoke hospital this should be listed in the timetables.

Richard Emery commented that the information on the route to Stoke hospital would be available on the "Traveline" website. The Member commented that older persons, who tended to make these journeys, did not normally use the internet so making the information available in timetables would be useful.

Richard Emery advised that hard copy timetables were slowly being phased out as they contained out of date information. Arriva's website contained the up to date information on bus services. Although timetables were currently still available they were not the primary source of information for finding out bus services/routes. Arriva's website provided a link to "Traveline" which provided information on interlinking services provided by individual bus operators so the public could plan their journeys.

A Member asked whether there was a statutory notice period for Arriva to advise

of any changes to services. Richard Emery informed Members that they had to provide 56 days notice to the Traffic Commissioner and the Local Authority when making changes to services. These changes were communicated to the public via timetable information being placed in the buses, on the website and at affected bus stops. If there were a larger number of changes to services these would be communicated to the public via roadshows in town centres.

A Member made reference to the new houses in the Green Heath area where there were currently no bus services. Jeff Tucker advised that the County Council were not in a position to provide a supported service unless developer funding, via s106 monies were available. All new housing developments would have a trigger point (at the point of occupation) for a developer contribution to become applicable. Once all developer contributions had been exhausted the County Council would seek to continue to operate services commercially.

Another Member referred to the minibuses that Arriva used to operate and asked if there were any plans for these to be reintroduced. Richard Emery explained that the minibuses came into circulation in 1986 - the life of these vehicles had now expired and the company had not purchased this type of vehicle in recent years. It was a possibility that the company may wish to explore; however, the same driver costs were involved in running a minibus or a normal bus.

A Councillor considered that the lack of bus services in certain areas was a massive barrier to employment. Potential employees had no way of getting to and from their place of employment if they were required to start early in the morning or work later in the evenings if no bus services were running in that area.

Jeff Tucker advised that the County Council recognised this issue and during the development of the i54 South Staffordshire technology based business park the County had worked with employers and recruitment companies to ascertain where employees with the correct skill set would reside and then ensured that the bus services provided co-ordinated with workers shift patterns. The 54 Stafford-i54-Wolverhampton and 154 Hednesford-Cannock-i54-Wolverhampton, National Express services were both funded with s106 monies. The 54 was performing well, but the 154 had a less certain long term future.

A Member made reference to the discussion that took place at the previous meeting regarding Gestamps relocation to a new site in Four Ashes. She had concern regarding existing employees who were not able to drive being able to get to the new site and asked if Staffordshire County Council had been involved in any discussions with Gestamp regarding this. Jeff Tucker commented that he had not been involved personally in any discussions regarding the provision of services to Four Ashes.

Michael Tichford, Head of Economic Development commented that he had recently met with Ian Middleton from Gestamp along with the Managing Director and the Planning and Economic Development Services Manager. It was clear that production would be maintained at the Cannock site for a lot longer than was first anticipated. There would be a 5 year phased period to relocate to the Four Ashes site. He would contact Ian Middleton to ascertain how the Travel Plan, as part of the planning application with South Staffordshire District Council, was

progressing and would also ask for an update on the Skills Academy that was proposed at the Cannock site following the relocation to Four Ashes.

The Member asked that the Committee be updated on this matter at a future meeting.

A Member commented that some parts of Norton Canes had no bus service at all with the recent service reductions. Richard Emery confirmed that there had not been sufficient use to sustain all the bus services in Norton Canes and therefore some services were removed last September. Services were provided in the areas in Norton Canes where there was the most demand. The Councillor commented that there were new houses being built in Norton Canes and considered there was a need to provide a bus service. Richard Emery advised that a service could only be provided if external funding through s106 monies was available.

A Member sought information on the best way to contact Arriva and the County Council to get information about changes to bus services. David Brent advised that press releases were issued by the Marketing Team and Members could be added to the distribution list if they wished. Jeff Tucker added that once the bus service changes were known these were shared at Member briefings with the District Commissioner Leads. John Morgan commented that Staffordshire County Council also provided monthly updates on their website regarding changes to the bus timetables.

A Member then raised the issue of developer funding and commented that the Planning Control Committee could possibly consider adding the provision of bus services as a condition to planning applications for housing developments. The Head of Economic Development confirmed that there would be an obligation to make a s106 contribution towards transport matters on planning applications for housing developments. The Chairman of the Planning Control Committee, who was present at the meeting, advised that she would speak with the Development Control Manager regarding this matter.

The Chairman asked if an update could be provided on "real time information". Jeff Tucker was not able to provide an update at the meeting but advised the Committee of the officer that would be able to provide this information. The Chairman commented that the Officer could be contacted and asked for this information.

The Chairman then asked Jeff Tucker to provide the Committee with an update on the Buses Bill. Jeff Tucker advised that the Buses Bill provided Local Authorities with greater influence on services and planning. The Bill aimed to provide strengthened partnerships and better working with bus operators in addition to enhancing existing services and providing franchising powers. The progress of the Bill had recently slowed down as the House of Lords had amended the Bill and it was back with the House of Commons. Royal Assent was planned for the summer of 2017. Consultation via the Local Government Association was being undertaken with a closing date for comments by 21 March, 2017.

He advised that the Bill offered enhanced partnerships for Local Authorities who could take on the role of Traffic Commissioner. It offered a better opportunity to work with bus operators to improve services. He added that there was no additional funding being provided once the Bill was passed. He commented that there would be limited franchising opportunities for the County Council and it was unlikely the County would go down this route.

The Chairman commented that once the Bill had Royal Assent the Committee may wish to include it on their Work Programme so that an update could be provided.

Jeff Tucker then advised Members of additional work that was on going regarding "cross sector working". Bus Operators and the County Council were looking at services and resources dedicated to transport provision and considering whether things could be done differently by working together to improve the travel options available. For example could none emergency hospital transport be undertaken in a standard vehicle or could a special needs transport vehicle be used for the wider community as well.

The Chairman thanked David Brent and Richard Emery (Arriva Midlands) and Jeff Tucker (Staffordshire County Council) for attending the Committee and providing the updates and answering Members questions.

AGREED:

That the Committee be updated at a future meeting on:

- (a) the progress of the Travel Plan, as part of the planning application with South Staffordshire District Council, in connection with Gestamps relocation to Four Ashes and
- (b) the proposed Skills Academy for Gestamps Cannock site following the relocation to Four Ashes.

27. Work Programme Update

Members noted the updated Work Programme (Item 5.1) and the issues that would be discussed at the next meeting on 12 April, 2017. Members were asked to let Sean O'Meara know if there was anything specific they wished to be updated on in connection with the Street Trading Policy item.

The meeting closed at 5.15pm.

CHAIRMAN

